

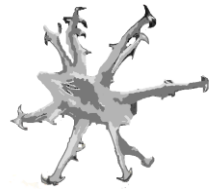
## Seed Dispersal By Animals

### Reading and Discussion

When young animals grow up they move away from their parents and make their own homes. But plants can't move, so they need another way to spread their seeds, otherwise they would all grow on top of each other.

Overcrowding would mean that plants would not have enough food or light to survive. The way they avoid this is by **seed dispersal**. Dispersal means spreading or scattering. Today we are going to learn about the role animals play in seed dispersal.

There are some seeds, like cocklebur, which hitch a lift on animals or people by sticking onto fur, feathers or clothing. They use **barbs**, **burrs** or **hooks** to do this. Did you know that the person who invented **velcro** got the idea from a burr like this one?



Other plants, like mistletoe, have small berries with sticky seeds which stick to a bird's bill. When the bird wipes its bill off on a branch or stone, the seeds fall off.

Some seeds are hidden inside fruit like apples or cherries. The sweetness of the fruit encourages birds and animals like mice and deer to eat it. The birds and animals eat the seeds with the fruit which passes through their bodies without being digested. In fact, some seeds cannot grow unless they have gone through an animal's digestive system.



Birds may also carry off seeds such as grass seed to eat, and then drop them on the way, giving them a chance to grow.

Other plants produce nuts which animals like squirrels collect and bury, storing up food for winter. The animals often forget where they have buried the nuts and eventually they begin to grow.



Birds like Jays and Nuthatches also collect acorns and hazelnuts. These often fall to the ground and germinate. Insects such as ants carry off the seeds which they store underground.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Activities

**Activity A:** How much can you remember?.

See how many of these questions you can answer without looking at the reading.

1. What does seed dispersal mean?
2. What would happen if plants could not disperse their seeds?
3. What do seeds use to 'hitch' a lift on an animal?
4. Where did the idea for **velcro** come from?
5. How does mistletoe disperse its seeds?
6. What makes animals eat the fruit in which the seeds are hidden?
7. What happens to the acorns which squirrels collect in autumn?
8. Can you name two other creatures that collect nuts or seeds?

**Activity B:** Go on a field trip.

Take a walk around your neighborhood or school yard. See how many plants you can find that use barbs, burrs or hooks to disperse their seeds. Write down their names on the list.

HITCH-HIKING PLANTS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### Activity A

1. Scattering or spreading of seeds.
2. They would not have enough food or light to survive.
3. Burrs, barbs or hooks.
4. From a burr.
5. Its seeds have a sticky coating which sticks to a bird's bill.
6. The fruit is sweet.
7. They bury them and forget where they are. The acorns then start growing.
8. Jays, nuthatches, ants.

### Activity B

This list will depend very much upon the school environment. Here are some of the plants the children might discover. If there are no accessible plants in the area, encourage the children to bring some from home and identify them at school. Alternatively, look for fruits or nuts.

HITCH-HIKING PLANTS	
Foxtail barley	Spanish needles
Stick-tight	Tick trefoil
Puncture vine	Cheat grass
Jumping cholla	Needle grass
Devil's claws	Burdock
Beggars' ticks,	Cocklebur.